

St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John Chapter 17

"Four Requests By Jesus"

I have a very important question to ask you: If you could choose anyone who ever lived to pray for you – who would it be? Billy Graham? Mother Teresa? Perhaps it could be your mother or even your grandmother? Let's not forget that Abraham and Moses had special relationships with God; Elijah called on God to defeat the prophets of Baal and Asherah in 1 Kings 18:18-46. If you have not read that – you should read it today. The Apostles Peter and Paul called on the Lord many times to heal people. How about Jesus Himself?

The entire seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John is a prayer that Jesus prays and is as much for all of us as it was for the Apostles that. Please open your Pew Bibles to page 1679. This is known as Jesus' High Priestly Prayer. He is with the Apostles in the Upper Room and He begins this prayer thanking the Father for revealing the truth through Him of His Word and helping Him to complete the work that He has been given by the Father to do. In verse 11 Jesus says "*I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you.*" This 'high priestly prayer' is made up of four special requests by Jesus of the Father.

Jesus then makes His first request – and that is for us to be protected and for unity. Jesus prayed "*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--so that they may be one as we are one.*" Jesus asks for the Father to protect and bring unity – a sense of oneness to us. Jesus is not praying for 'uniformity' –that we all dress the same on Sunday morning and we all do the same movements or rubrics and we follow it that way, but instead He asks for unity – that the church might believe in Him and walk together in that truth. Since being here in Douglas, on your behalf I am a member – we are members of the Coffee County Ministerial Association. Every Wednesday morning we gather in the Baptist Church Old Meeting Hall and we share what is going on, we share the Word of God. The month of May has been my month to teach each Wednesday morning It has been a tremendous blessing – I don't have to worry about who the audience is; I don't have to worry if they believe the same thing I do; I don't have to worry if John 14:6 is a hotbed of coals. I know that each one of these Pastors, both men and women believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be true and inerrant. They believe the Bible to be inerrant. How wonderful that is! That is what Jesus was praying for. Think about the parts of a car – that are united – each giving up their individual qualities so that the car may work as a whole. If the battery decides not to work – what happens? Dead Car! Christ was praying for unity – not uniformity.

Jesus then prays in verse 12 "*While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that Scripture would be fulfilled.*" In spite of the loss of Judas' betrayal Jesus wanted the apostles to be in one accord – for the purpose of being united in the ministry that He has charged them, and charged us with – to being the truth of His Gospel to the world – so that everyone might believe.

We read from the first chapter of the Book of Acts this morning – the timing of which tells us that Jesus walked the earth for forty days; forty days – not from Passover but forty days since His resurrection. There are about seven days left until Pentecost. One week before Pentecost Jesus told the disciples these words: “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8) Just before that He said you will receive the Holy Spirit in just a few days. Seven days until Pentecost; good Lord! Receive the Holy Spirit. Our Protector, our Counselor, Our Comforter – coming so that we might be in one accord, with the courage to share the Gospel with others.

Now if you would, please look at verse 15 of chapter 17 – Jesus prays: “*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.*” Throughout Jesus’ ministry He took the enemy head on to protect those He loves. For example with the woman at the well, the demoniac in the Gadarenes – named Legion, the demon possessed man in Capernaum and others. Jesus does not want believers to be bullied and pushed around by Satan – and He now asks the Father to give that same protection so that it would be possible to win the battle with sin and Satan and live victoriously in Christ. That protection would come through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, free to be in people the very moment Jesus took His last breath, and the Temple veil was torn in two – not from bottom to top as man could rip it, but from top to bottom as only God could rip it.

Jesus’ second request of the Father: Jesus requests that His joy would fill them, and continues saying that the prayer He is praying is being heard by them so that they might be filled with His full measure of joy. Most of the prayers that Jesus prayed were not written down by the apostles and were most likely prayed in the solitude of His alone prayer time with the Father. Remember Jesus would go to the hillside to pray? This time – just like Jesus’ prayer at Lazarus’ tomb – He wants His words to resound and be carried into the hearts of believers – despite the hate that would be aimed at believers by the world. Jesus delighted in fulfilling the Father’s will and He wants us to have delight, gladness and joy in our relationship with the Father.

I believe that there is a serious misconception in the world today that Christians are supposed to be sullen and straight-laced – but here Jesus is asking that those who believe in Him would be filled with His joy. Laughing is not taboo – smiling is not unforgivable – let alone singing! We are given that joy and it should radiate in Christians faces. The light of Christ’s love should shine. Last week I was talking about that old hymn – “and they’ll know we are Christians by our love” – you reflect His love. The truth is – living for Jesus offers the highest pleasure in life.

For Jesus’ third request - let’s move on to verses 17 to 20 – Jesus prays to the Father asking for Him to “*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*” Folks, I think it is very important for us to understand the meaning of the word ‘*sanctified*’ – it means set apart for sacred use. In the very same way that God used the Holy

Ground of Mount Sinai, telling Moses to take off his sandals because it was Holy Ground, so that He could reveal and declare Himself to Moses as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and to all the Israelites and like in the Temple with the Holy of Holies – God wants to use us to bring Him glory. Jesus was set apart to bring Glory to the Father – and so He asks the Father to set us apart – so that we would do the same.

Jesus wants His believers to be kept out of the prison of sin – so that the world would know that God is in control. Jesus wants them kept in unity and love to show the world that Jesus' believers – Christians, are different. His complete love for us – in that He would go to the cross for each one of us – will be the method to give us joy and gladness – that can be shown to the rest of the world – showing them that we have what they are looking for. Jesus wants all believers sanctified so that His beauty can come through the outer layer of our humanity. Look at verses 21, 22 and 23: Jesus prays for believers *“that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

Jesus' fourth and last request is for our eternal place with Him – it is His prayer at verse 24 – He says *“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”* Jesus always was and always will be! Just hearing Jesus *“I want those you have given me to be with me where I am”* just brings back to me the words that Jesus said earlier that evening when Jesus spoke to the disciples as recorded in John 14:3 *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* Wow - I don't know about you – but that excites me. The very thought of spending eternity with Jesus in heaven; and Jesus says that He wants us to share that promise with others. Look at verses 25-26: He prays *“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”* Jesus lets the Apostles, and us, hear His hopes for mankind.

I find it absolutely amazing that Jesus spent some of the final moments on the earth, of His life praying for and interceding on behalf of all believers –not just those who were present in the room, and expressing His hopes for all humanity. These requests should give us hope and a future – and they remind me of the words that God Himself spoke through the Prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 29:11 where He says *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”* I am humbled by Jesus' love for us and I know the hope that comes from this prayer that Jesus prayed on our behalf.

The Creator of the Universe took the time to pray

- for our protection and unity,

Seventh Sunday of Easter, Sunday, May 28, 2017, Year A

- that His joy would fill each and every one of us, each and every day.
- for us to be set apart for sacred use – sanctified,
- and that we would come to the place that He has prepared for us – that we may be where He is.

Thank you Lord Jesus that your love for us is so amazing that I want to make these requests part of my daily prayer life and practice as well – and I can only do that with God's help.